

By Ramon Padilla

I often get e-mails from readers (which I happily reply to) asking how they can prepare to move up to a leadership position. The questions I get often are related to formal preparations, including degrees to obtain and classes to take. I have written about these skills on a number of occasions in my blogs, and they can be summed up as writing, speaking, and thinking on your feet. Those skills are critical to leadership.

Perhaps more important than having the right degrees and certifications is acquiring the softer skills that enable you to move on to leadership positions. Specifically, these are the skills that allow you to recognize opportunities, evaluate them, and then take advantage of them.

## 1 It's not all about the ladder

The first thing to realize is that taking advantage of a leadership opportunity does not necessarily mean moving up on the career ladder. It can be simply a matter of taking on more responsibility or taking ownership of something. Often, this type of opportunity has no monetary or status reward other than the personal growth that allows you to be better prepared for your next opportunity.

## 2 Leadership happens

Sometimes, leadership is not a choice—it may be thrust upon you. This can happen in a million ways, but the important thing is to recognize the opportunity and to step up and do the best you can with the situation you have just been handed. Be careful in these situations. People often look upon them as “why me?” instead of taking advantage of an opportunity. You may be in for more work, but it comes with the territory.

## 3 Know your organization

You won't be able to spot opportunities if you don't know what's going on around you. If you desire a leadership position, your ears are always open and your radar is on. If you limit your curiosity to just what is in front of you, you are going to miss out on the big picture. That doesn't mean you have to go golfing with your company's CEO and CFO, but you better be dang-dang sure you recognize them should you see them. This works up and down the chain. The more you know about people and what they do, the better prepared you will be to handle a leadership opportunity.

## 4 Don't be a wallflower

If people have no clue who you are, they will never think of you when opportunities arise. Find ways to make your presence known without being obnoxious about it. By the way, being good at what you do never hurts.

## 5 Make sure you're easy to work with

If you have a reputation of being hard to work with, people will avoid you like the plague—and so will leadership opportunities.

## 6 Act like a leader

Volunteer for stuff. Management is often looking for people to volunteer to lead. Just make sure you follow through and perform well when you do volunteer—no half hearted attempts allowed here.

## **7 Dress for success**

You don't have to wear a tux to work and you don't have to look like the oddball in your workgroup, but kick your wardrobe up a notch. This can mean buying a better brand of Polo shirt or perhaps ironing or taking your clothes to the cleaners. You never know when you are going to get a chance at a first impression, and you usually have only one shot at it. Also, people automatically assume that those in power are the better-dressed individuals. They don't call them "suits" for nothing. [Perception is reality.](#)

## **8 Be self assured**

Lack of confidence exudes an aura that can be spotted a mile away. Believe in yourself 100 percent. That doesn't mean you can't have any doubts, but always believe you can achieve when called upon.

## **9 Don't slander your coworkers**


There will be opportunities in your work life where you will be called upon to criticize others or their work. Be tactful. Always criticize the work, not the person, and be constructive in your criticism. Slandering your coworkers makes you look bad and creates enemies.

## **10 Look for messes to be cleaned up**

Every failure is an opportunity for success. You want to fill some shoes? Put on the shoes of someone who has failed miserably. It's a lot easier to look like a superstar when your predecessor was a dud.

I could go on, but then you would have a list that is too long to remember <grin>. If you're looking for a leadership opportunity, it won't take you too long to find one. Most of the time, they will find you. Make sure you are constantly working on both your hard and soft skills to maximize your chances when the right situation comes along. As is often the case, being in the right place at the right time with the right credentials is all it takes to turn your life and career in a completely different direction. If you prepare every day for the possibility of leadership, you'll be ready to seize that opportunity when it comes your way.

## Additional resources

- TechRepublic's [Downloads RSS Feed](#) 
- Sign up for TechRepublic's [Downloads Weekly Update](#) newsletter
- Sign up for our [IT Career NetNote](#)
- Check out all of TechRepublic's [free newsletters](#)
- [10 dirty little secrets you should know about working in IT](#)
- [25 qualities that will get you promoted](#)
- [Top 10 leadership qualities of successful CIOs](#)

## Version history

**Version:** 1.0

**Published:** September 4, 2007

## Tell us what you think

TechRepublic downloads are designed to help you get your job done as painlessly and effectively as possible. Because we're continually looking for ways to improve the usefulness of these tools, we need your feedback. Please take a minute to [drop us a line](#) and tell us how well this download worked for you and offer your suggestions for improvement.

Thanks!

—The TechRepublic Downloads Team